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Housekeepers' Chat

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NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Subject: "What I Want in the House I Build." Information from Dr. Louise Stanley, Chief, Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

Bulletins available: "Convenient Kitchens," "Floors and Floor Coverings."

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What do you want in the house you build? Oh, you may say, we can't afford to build, for years and years -- so why ask that question now?

Well, even though the actual building is years ahead, it won't do any harm to start now to plan on paper. Pretty soon you will find yourself becoming "House conscious." That is, you will want to visit new houses, and look over the rooms, examine the various built-in features, compare prices, and so on. I have been looking at new houses for a number of weeks. There's one new home in our neighborhood which has never been lived in.

"You can have it at your own price," said the real estate agent, when I asked about it. "The man who built it didn't consult his wife about the plans, and when the house was built, she refused to live in it."

Well, that's neither here nor there, so far as we are concerned. This morning I want to tell you the experiences of Doctor Louise Stanley, Chief of the Bureau of Home Economics. Doctor Stanley has built two houses.

"Most houses are planned by men," says Doctor Stanley. "Women have been allowed to say what they want, but many of their suggestions have been dismissed as being impractical . . . . There are certain things, though, which every woman wants in her house. Sometimes she is in a better position to judge about these things than either her husband or the architect. Judging from the things I want in a house, women's ideals center about a fireplace, a compact and well-equipped bathroom or bathrooms, plenty of storage-space, and last but not least, a convenient kitchen. After one has lived about in other folks' houses, these are the things women are most likely to want, and men enjoy them just as much as women."

So much for what women want, generally speaking.

Now let's begin over again, and be more specific. The fireplace, Doctor Stanley says, is really the center of the home. Around the fireplace, the living-room provides for all the general life of the family, and the entertainment of the friends who help so much to make living worth while.

The ideal living room is sunshiny in winter, cool in summer, pleasant in outlook, and good in proportions. And of course it is planned to furnish a suitable back-ground for the furniture. Do you want a main stairway? It is always easier, as well as more private, if the main stairway does not go up directly from the livingroom. As for bookcases -- built-in shelves somehow seem to "belong" much more than do ordinary movable bookcases.

How much room shall we leave for the various pieces of furniture in the living room? Doctor Stanley suggests a simple way to find out. Measure the actual furniture that is going to be used, and draw each piece on cardboard, in the same scale as the house plans. When these pieces are cut we can place them on the house plan, and thus see for ourselves how much room the furniture will occupy.

Most everybody wants a porch, open from the living room. If a covered porch would cut off too much light from the living room, we might consider an open terrace, paved with brick, tile, stone, slate, or cement. An interesting combination is an enclosed porch, or sun room, closely connected with the living room, and an open terrace to provide a cool place to sit during hot summer days. If the terrace is close enough to the kitchen for convenient serving of meals, the arrangement is ideal.

A sun room can often be used as a sleeping porch. Many families, once accustomed to sleeping outdoors, are loath to sleep indoors. Incidentally, the use of a sleeping porch really makes for a warmer house in winter, and less cleaning in the bedrooms, the year 'round.

Bath rooms are now under discussion. Bathrooms need not be large, as modern plumbing fixtures are planned to fit into surprisingly small space. A built-in tub, extending to the floor and fitted into a special alcove, minimizes the bugbear of cleaning a bathroom. Desirable furnishings in the bathroom are a medicine closet, a storage closet for clean towels, and a receptacle for soiled linens. If the bathroom is to serve as a dressing room, a built-in chest of drawers is useful.

Now, what do we want in the way of storage space? Lots of it, most all women will agree. Isn't it discouraging to move into a house, and find the closets too narrow for coat-hangars, with no shelves for linens, hat boxes and shoes? And it is amazing, how many places there are where suitable closets can be built, without the space being missed.

And then the kitchen! Let's see what Doctor Stanley says about this important room.

"In many homes," she says, "much time is wasted in the preparation of meals. One reason for this is that some kitchens are planned with no real thought of the work to be done there. The kitchen should be compact, in order to eliminate extra steps."

Well, well -- that's just what we discussed yesterday -- how many miles a woman walks, in doing her house work.

What did we decide we want in our ideal kitchen? Equipment in groups, according to the different kinds of work to be carried on. A place for everything, and, as far as possible, each utensil in the place at which it will be used.

As for the equipment, every woman wants furnishings that require the least possible amount of care. Built-in furniture decreases kitchen work by lessening the floor space, and leaving no place behind for dust and dirt to collect. If the furniture cannot be built to the floor, then we want enough space left under it to allow for easy cleaning. In our ideal kitchen, we want no unnecessary angles, and all surfaces should be of materials which can be cleaned easily with soap and water.

The worktable should be within easy reach from the refrigerator, the sink, and the stove, while all the utensils most often used should be grouped just above and below the worktable. On our work table, we want rollers, so that the table can be easily moved to the most convenient spot.

Doctor Stanley contends that an alcove should be added to one side of a kitchen, for the stove, with only the front side accessible. This would certainly assure the removal of fumes, and keep a great deal of the heat of cooking out of the kitchen. I have never seen a kitchen with this feature, but doubtless there are many in the most up-to-date houses.

"If you are planning to build," concludes Doctor Stanley, "be sure to start your plans early. Cross-section paper will make it much less difficult for you to draw out your ideas to scale, bit by bit. Then you will have something definite to show the architect . . . It will be a vastly interesting project throughout, and the results will be not only a more convenient and livable house, but one that reflects much of yourself.

Those are all of Doctor Stanley's suggestions, about house building. There are two bulletins which I think might help you in planning a home, "Convenient Kitchen" and "Floors and Floor Coverings." Shall I send them to you?

Wednesday: "Questions and Answers"

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